

sist in getting a more nearly internal concept of being responsible for keeping my hand out of the cookie jar. The threat of physical punishment and the promise of material reward might come to play no essential role in my understanding of my obligation. Instead, the fear that Mother might show disappointment by the look on her face would, perhaps, be threat enough. At this point, though, my concept of obligation would still be somewhat external in that there would have to be someone outside me, some external authority figure, to hold me responsible for whatever it is I am obligated to do.

At a third stage of moral development, on this concept-displacement model, I might eventually learn to function as my own authority figure, my own "lawgiver." I could then recognize an obligation to respect the wishes of my mother, or the obligation to be brave, or to tell the truth, even when there was no likelihood that Mother or Father, Teacher or Priest, would be able to check up on me. To be sure, I might want the approval of some authority figure. I am only human. And if I lied or behaved in a cowardly fashion, I would doubtless prefer that no authority figure find out. But at the third stage I would find nothing odd or paradoxical in the suggestion that I have an obligation, say, not to read my office-mate's electronic mail, even though that responsibility has never been specifically laid on me by my parents or teachers, even my boss, and it is not backed by the promise of external reward or the threat of external punishment.

Is this a good way to think of moral development? One thing that should give us pause is the realization that, according to this model of moral development, those children who are at the first stage in the process are really only "pre-moral" beings. The reason they are only pre-moral is that their concept of obligation as the realization that they will likely be punished if they do such-and-such is not a concept of moral obligation at all.

To see that this is so, imagine that I live in a police state. I may agree to report to the police the daily activities of my neighbor,

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Moral Development

Is it a good idea to think of moral development as concept displacement? That is, is it a good idea to conceive moral development as exchanging a less adequate concept of honesty, courage, justice, obligation, or whatever, for a better one, and then exchanging that concept for a still better one?

How would the story go? Well, consider the concept of moral obligation. One might say that a child starts out with only a very external concept of obligation. According to this "stage-one concept," an obligation is something someone *else* holds one responsible for, not a responsibility one lays on oneself. The relevant "somebody else" would be an authority figure—Mother, Father, Teacher, Priest, Police Officer. The embedded concept of being held responsible would also be external in that it would have to do with the threat of physical punishment and the promise of material reward.

Thus suppose Mother tells me not to raid the cookie jar. She goes off to the grocer's and leaves me alone in the house. I am obliged not to eat any cookies while she is away. If I am very small, perhaps my understanding of being held responsible for keeping my hands out of the cookie jar would be limited to the realization that, if I do take another cookie and Mother finds out, I will probably be spanked.

Getting a more advanced concept of obligation might then con-

I may agree to do this even though I consider such reporting distasteful, perhaps even wrong. I may do it anyway out of fear that I will otherwise lose my job. In any case, I can accept the obligation the police lay on me to spy on my neighbors without my thinking of it as being a moral obligation, and without its being for me a moral obligation.

If the concept of obligation that children have includes no recognition, on any level, of the moral appropriateness of at least some of the things they feel obligated to do, then their concept of obligation is not a concept of moral obligation at all. It is just the recognition that there are some things we get punished, or rewarded, for doing.

Some people may welcome this consequence of the concept-displacement-model of moral development. They will agree that young children are, in fact, only pre-moral agents. For them the concept of obligation a child has at, say, age five has to do with morality only in the very minimal sense that one needs to have this concept so as to be able to exchange it later on for a concept with real, moral content. It is thus a genuinely pre-moral concept.

I, myself, consider this consequence enough by itself to discredit the concept-displacement approach to understanding moral development. It is not that I think young children are morally better than the concept-displacement approach allows. It is rather that I think young children, even very young children, are at least genuinely moral agents. By that I do not mean just that they are capable of sometimes doing the right thing. I mean that they are capable of sometimes doing the right thing for the right reason, or, at least, for a good reason, a genuinely moral reason. They may not be able to articulate well the reasons they have for fulfilling their obligations. But they are capable of recognizing and accepting a moral obligation as a claim on them that is something different from a threat of punishment or a promise of reward.

What I have in mind is something rather ordinary, but yet also profound. One can see it, I think, in this description of and com-

mentary on the behavior of an infant, Michael, then only fifteen months old:

[Michael] was struggling with his friend, Paul, over a toy. Paul started to cry. Michael appeared concerned and let go of the toy so that Paul would have it, but Paul kept crying. Michael paused, then gave his teddy bear to Paul, but the crying continued. Michael paused again, then ran to the next room, returned with Paul's security blanket, and offered it to Paul, who then stopped crying.

The psychologist Martin L. Hoffman, perhaps the leading researcher on empathy in young children, comments:

First, it does seem clear that Michael assumed that his own teddy, which often comforts him, would also comfort his friend. Second, its failure to do this served as corrective feedback, which led Michael to consider alternatives. Third, in considering the processes underlying Michael's final, successful act, three possibilities stand out: (1) he was simply imitating an effective instrumental act observed in the past; that is, he had observed Paul being comforted with the blanket. This can be tentatively ruled out, since Michael's parents could not recall his ever having such an opportunity. (2) In trying to think of what to do, he remembered seeing another child being soothed by a blanket, and this reminded him of Paul's blanket—a more complex response than might first appear, since Paul's blanket was out of Michael's perceptual field at the time. (3) Michael, as young as he was, could somehow reason by analogy that Paul would be comforted by something that he loved in the same way that Michael loved his own teddy.¹

Hoffman adds: "I favor the last interpretation, although it does postulate a complex response for a young child."

It is worth noting that the interpretation that Hoffman says he favors does not account for Michael's behavior unless we also assume that Michael somehow thought he ought to comfort Paul.

However exactly one interprets this particular incident, it seems to me obvious that some very young children sometimes act in gen-

unely moral ways, not just in pre-moral ways. That means, they act with some kind of understanding that what they are doing is a good thing to do because, say, it will help someone out, or comfort someone, and not just that it might be a way to avoid being punished or a way to get rewarded. Since the concept-displacement approach to moral development allows children at the earliest stages only a pre-moral understanding of what they are doing, it is for that reason defective.

Let's see how this point plays itself out within the terms of the most influential contemporary theory of moral development, that of Lawrence Kohlberg. Kohlberg presents subjects with moral dilemmas and then grades their responses, in particular, the justifications they offer for their solutions to the dilemmas, so as to locate each subject at one of six or so stages of moral development.² The most famous of Kohlberg's dilemmas is this one:

In Europe, a woman was near death from a special kind of cancer. There was one drug that the doctors thought might save her. It was a form of radium that a druggist in the same town had recently discovered. The drug was expensive to make, but the druggist was charging ten times what the drug cost him to make. He paid \$400 for the radium and charged \$4,000 for a small dose of the drug. The sick woman's husband, Heinz, went to everyone he knew to borrow the money, but he could only get together about \$2,000, which is half what it cost. He told the druggist that his wife was dying, and asked him to sell it cheaper or let him pay later. But the druggist said, "No, I discovered the drug and I'm going to make money from it." So Heinz got desperate and considered breaking into the man's store to steal the drug for his wife.³

As I say, subjects are assigned by Kohlberg to a stage of moral development, not according to what they say Heinz should do (for example, steal the drug), but rather according to the justification they offer for whatever they say that Heinz should do. (For example, the subject might say, "He should steal the drug and give

it to his wife because saving somebody's life is more important than whether you steal.")

At Stage 1 a subject will exhibit what Kohlberg calls "the punishment and obedience orientation." At Stage 2 an elementary reciprocity emerges, but it amounts only to "You scratch my back and I'll scratch yours." Stages 1 and 2 constitute what Kohlberg calls the "Preconventional Level" of moral development.

Stages 3 and 4 make up the "Conventional Level." At Stage 3 one has achieved the "good-boy-nice-girl orientation"; Stage 4 is the "law and order" orientation.

Stages 5 and 6 constitute what Kohlberg calls the "Postconventional," "Autonomous," or "Principles" level. Stage 5 is based on the idea of a social contract. And, finally, at Stage 6 "right is defined by the decision of conscience in accord with self-chosen ethical principles appealing to logical comprehensiveness, universality and consistency."⁴

During some thirty years of investigation, Kohlberg and his collaborators amassed a staggering amount of evidence to show that the order of this development is fixed, in that no one reaches stage $n + 1$ without first going through stage n , and there is no regression to an earlier stage.⁵ *wrong - see bandont*

Kohlberg's scheme seems to show little interesting cultural bias. (By 'interesting cultural bias' I mean bias that cannot be eliminated by the sensitive redescription of Kohlberg's dilemmas to fit other cultures.) As one recent investigator has put the matter,

The evidence suggests that Kohlberg's interview is reasonably culture fair when the content is creatively adapted and the subject is interviewed in his or her native language. The invariant sequence proposition was also found to be well supported, because stage skipping and stage regressions were rare and always below the level that could be attributed to measurement error.⁶

For these and other reasons, Kohlberg's theory is one of the best articulated and most thoroughly supported theories in all devel-

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opmental psychology. Nevertheless, many people are profoundly dissatisfied with it. Perhaps my comments about the inadequacy of the concept-displacement approach to understanding moral development reveal an important source of that dissatisfaction.

Does Kohlberg's theory make clear why the concept of obligation a child has at Stage 1 ("punishment and obedience orientation") or Stage 2 ("you scratch my back and I'll scratch yours") is a moral concept at all, even if only a primitive moral concept? The answer is no.

A Kohlbergian might reply by pointing out that the first two stages are characterized as the "pre-moral level." The idea is, presumably, that the concepts of obligation a child has at these stages are moral only in the sense that one has to develop each of them and move on to something else in order to arrive at a genuinely moral concept. Such a reply seems unsatisfactory for two reasons. First, it is surely implausible to suppose that not a single subject at Stages 1 or 2 has any understanding at all of what real morality consists in. Second, a similar difficulty recurs anyway at Stage 3, and perhaps even at Stage 4. One who conforms to expectations simply to avoid disapproval (Stage 3) or even one who acts to maintain the "given social order for its own sake" (Stage 4)⁷ has not, it seems, or at least not for those reasons, attained a specifically moral understanding of obligation.

It begins to look as though all stages before Stage 5, or even Stage 6, are really pre-moral stages. Since, according to Kohlberg's research, hardly anyone, perhaps no one, reaches Stage 6, and only a small minority reach even Stage 5, we are driven to the unwelcome conclusion that the vast majority of people do not have a specifically moral concept of obligation. It is not just that most people do not usually act morally; that would hardly be a surprising conclusion. What is both surprising and objectionable is the conclusion that the vast majority of people do not have any real understanding of what morality consists in.

This worry is underlined by the fact that Kohlberg himself

defines morality in terms of impartiality, universalizability, reversibility, and prescriptivity. If Kohlberg is right and a judgment is moral if, and only if, it exhibits those formal features, then the concepts of obligation one has at lower stages of development are not even primitive moral concepts; they are not moral concepts at all.

This worry can be made concrete by appeal to a hypothetical example. Suppose Susan, age six, is given a Kohlberg interview and is found to be at Stage 1. What this means is that Susan's ability to reason her way through a moral dilemma and to resolve a moral conflict, and especially her ability to articulate such a resolution, are very primitive. Now suppose that when cookies and orange juice are distributed to Susan's class in school, Susan herself happens to get two cookies, whereas James, through a simple oversight, gets none, and everyone else gets one. We can imagine that Susan first rejoices in her good fortune, but then, noting that James got no cookie at all, gives one of hers to him. She has done the fair thing, she has done what she ought to do, what, in those circumstances, morality requires.

Of course Susan might have given James her extra cookie out of fear that she would be reprimanded for accepting two cookies when James had none. Or she might have given him a cookie in the hope of praise from her teacher, or a favor, later on, from James. She might have had these motivations. But there is no reason to suppose she has to act out of fear of punishment or hope of reward. In particular, and this is the crucial point, the fact that she scores at Stage 1 in a Kohlberg interview does not mean that she cannot act out of a sense of fairness when she is not confronted with a moral dilemma, let alone confronted with the need to resolve and justify her resolution of a moral dilemma.

A Kohlbergian might reply that Susan does not really have a sense of fairness if her moral reasoning is at Stage 1. She may be modeling behavior that she observes in others, or conforming to pressures from adults or peers, but she is not really acting from a

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sense of fairness unless she can give Stage 5 or Stage 6 reasoning to resolve a moral dilemma.

In my view, this Kohlbergian response focuses on only one of the several dimensions of moral development and ignores all the rest. To make this point clear, let me outline an alternative conception of moral development.

Each of us can bring to mind, for each major term of moral assessment in our active vocabulary (for example, 'moral,' 'immoral,' 'fair,' 'unfair,' 'honest,' 'lying,' 'brave,' 'cowardly,' and so on) at least one paradigmatic situation to which we think the term applies. Our understanding of what these terms mean includes our ability to assimilate other cases to these paradigms.

Our first paradigm of bravery is, perhaps, succeeding in not crying in the doctor's office when we are about to be stuck with a needle. For telling a lie my paradigm may be denying, falsely, that I ate little brother's piece of candy when he was out playing. For fairness, the paradigm may be dividing the cookies evenly among the members of a school class so that each one gets the same number of cookies.

It will be objected that I am making a naive mistake here of the kind that Socrates' hapless interlocutors are always making in the early Platonic dialogues. An example of lying, even a paradigm example, is not what lying is. Surely, the objection continues, only someone who can define 'lying' satisfactorily really knows what lying is, and only such a person has succeeded in latching onto the immoral behavior that is properly called "lying."

My reply is twofold. First, it is an open question whether any of us can give an entirely satisfactory definition of 'lying.' (We should not be surprised that the early Platonic dialogues end in perplexity!) Yet most of us have a working grasp of what lying is. Therefore, having a working grasp of what lying is, is something other than being able to give an entirely satisfactory definition of 'lying.' In fact, it can consist in having a basic understanding of

central paradigms of lying and the ability to compare other cases to these paradigms so as to determine whether they, too, should count as cases of lying.

Second, Socrates' technique in the early Platonic dialogues requires his interlocutors (and his readers) to test out suggested definitions with their own intuitions. Thus Socrates in Book I of the *Republic* rejects Cephalus's definition of 'justice' (telling the truth and paying your debts) by asking, rhetorically, whether one should return a weapon to its owner if, in the meantime, the owner has gone mad. As readers, we are expected to answer, "No, of course not." But on what basis can we give that answer if we have, as yet, no satisfactory definition of 'justice'? Clearly such testing of suggested definitions by counterexample is a futile exercise unless we already have a working grasp of the relevant term of moral assessment. Having such a grasp may consist simply in having a basic understanding of central paradigms and the ability to assess other cases by reference to those paradigms.

In my view moral development takes place across at least five different dimensions. First, there is the dimension of paradigms. A fabrication to escape punishment is a good first paradigm for lying. A misrepresentation to gain some advantage for oneself may be a second paradigm. (Lisa says she doesn't know what time it is—though she does, really—so as to be allowed to watch the rest of her TV program.) A group conspiracy to flout authority may be a third paradigm. (Albert tells the teacher he did not see who shot the spitwad even though he saw Leonard do it.)

A second dimension of moral development is relative success in offering defining characteristics. 'Saying something naughty the way Louis did' may be a simple, but appropriate, beginning. 'Uttering a falsehood' will be an improvement. 'Uttering a falsehood when you know better' is still better. 'Saying something you know is false to deceive someone else' is even better than that.

It is important to recognize, however, that none of these definitions is entirely satisfactory. Consider the last one ('Saying

something you know is false to deceive someone else'). Suppose the teacher wants to find out who spread mustard on the washbasins in the school washroom. She already has circumstantial evidence that my school chum Ben did it. Moreover, she has good reason to think that I witnessed the awful deed. But she cannot punish Ben unless a witness comes forward. She asks me and I deny that Ben did it. The teacher may realize that I am protecting my friend. (I have often done that before.) There is no deception involved. I may even realize that the teacher realizes that I am protecting my friend. Still, when I say that I didn't see Ben spread mustard on the wash basins, I tell a lie.

So the last definition is also defective. Moreover, I do not know how to repair it. Perhaps someone can offer a definition of 'lying' that fits all our cherished intuitions and is also informative. But the important point is that no one need be able to do this to have a working grasp of what lying is. To begin with, one need only have a basic understanding of one central paradigm.

A third dimension of development concerns the range of cases that fall under each term of moral assessment and how we deal with borderline cases. Is writing a bad check, when one knows that one's balance is insufficient to cover the check, a case of lying? Can a photograph lie? Is it lying for a student who was thrown out of college to wear the college tie?

A fourth dimension of moral development concerns the adjudication of conflicting moral claims, or to put the matter less tendentiously, the adjudication of apparently conflicting moral claims. Sometimes telling a lie is not being naughty; sometimes it is one's duty. How can this be? Though it is *prima facie* wrong to tell a lie, other moral claims may override the demand to tell the truth. We develop morally as we get better and better at thinking our way through such conflicts, or apparent conflicts.

Fifth, there is the dimension of moral imagination. Michael, at fifteen months, seems to have had the imagination to understand Paul's distress and to think of getting Paul's security blanket so

that Paul would be comforted. Even at that very young age, Michael was quite advanced along the dimension of moral imagination.

Of course Michael's experience of the world and his understanding of how it works will be very limited at fifteen months. A very young child will not be able to empathize with, say, a victim of racial or gender discrimination because the child's experience and understanding of society are too limited. In general, we may hope to advance along the scale of moral imagination as we grow older and our experience of life becomes broader and deeper.

Yet this need not happen. People become overwhelmed by the problems of the society around them, or increasingly preoccupied with their own personal agendas. When that happens, even a very young and inexperienced child can catch us adults up short with a direct, empathetic response to, say, a homeless person trying to keep warm in a cardboard box under a bridge. A child's naive question can awaken our sleeping imagination and sympathy, and even move us to take moral action.

On the view I advocate, then, moral development takes place across these five different dimensions. Kohlberg concentrates on only one, namely, the fourth dimension (adjudicating moral conflicts or dilemmas). But long before a child will have to deal with moral dilemmas, let alone give a justification for resolving a dilemma, the child can have a strong empathetic response to the victims of suffering, or injustice, and a working understanding of central paradigms for terms of moral assessment.

Most of us never lose the paradigms we first assimilated in childhood. The equal division of cookies remains for us a paradigm of distributive justice. As Susan grows and develops we hope she will enlarge her stock of paradigms from handing out cookies fairly to distributing work assignments fairly among workers of varied abilities, to, perhaps, refusing to change the rules in the middle of a game. And we hope Susan will grow along other dimensions of moral development as well. But the simple paradigms of distrib-

utive justice will stay with her permanently. And no contrast between the virtuosity of her later reasoning and the naiveté of her early appeal to simple paradigms can establish that those early actions were not really performed from a sense of fairness.

Parents sometimes report to me that one child in their family got recognized early on as the "justice person" in that family. Perhaps it all began with cookie distribution at age three. But it continued through middle childhood, late childhood, and adolescence. This particular child would always be the person in that family who would ask, "But is that really fair?" Mother or Father might be called on to reassess things in answer to a question like that from a child. And the "justice person" needn't be the oldest child of the family, either.

Theories of cognitive and moral development often encourage us to distance ourselves from children—both from the children around us and from our own childhood selves. Such distancing sometimes produces a new respect for children. After all, it warns us against faulting children for shortcomings that express, according to the theories, immature cognitive and moral structures that are entirely normal for children of the given age range.

Yet such distancing can also encourage condescension. If we suppose that children live in conceptual worlds that are structurally different from ours, but that will naturally evolve into ours, how can we fail to be condescending toward children as moral agents?

The condescension, though understandable, is unwarranted. One reason it is unwarranted is that, as we saw in the last chapter, later structures are not entirely unquestionable accomplishments; characteristically, they are problematic in ways that philosophers never tire of exposing. Thus it is an open question whether anyone at all can provide an entirely satisfactory theory of justice or, as I remarked earlier, even an entirely satisfactory definition of 'lying.'

Another reason such condescension is unwarranted is that chil-

dren, in their simple directness, often bring us adults back to basics. Any developmental theory that rules out, on purely theoretical grounds, even the possibility that we adults may occasionally have something to learn, morally, from a child is, for that reason, defective; it is also morally offensive.